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Cecil E. Collier, First Cavalry, United States Army

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Cecil E. Collier, First Cavalry, US Army

Cecil Ensley Collier

Nov. 14, 1920 – Jan. 24, 1988

June 6, 2017. . . the 73rd anniversary of the D-Day invasion of Normandy. The day considered by

many to be the greatest day of the 20th century. The day when over 150,000 Allies in more than 5,000 boats and ships undertook the largest amphibious invasion ever seen. A day that saw over 4,400 Allies, mostly 18-22 year olds, die in this assault on Hitler's Europe. As time moves away from the event, the impact, the significance, the sacrifice unfortunately become faded in the minds of those of us who weren't there, just as the Battle of Gettysburg, one of the bloodiest days in American history, is now best known as the setting for a speech.

Perhaps at least a sliver of reality of that terrible yet important day can be seen in the first 30 minutes of the movie "Saving Private Ryan."

June 6, 1944 . . . D-Day in Europe. . . meanwhile, on the other side of the world, in the South Pacific, the strategy of "island hopping" spawned numerous amphibious assaults, smaller than the Normandy invasion but no less lethal. It was there that 23-year old Cecil E. Collier was preparing himself for the invasion of the Philippine island of Leyte.

Cecil Ensley Collier was born in Nacogdoches, Texas in 1920. He was the great-grandson of Robert Terrell Collier, who moved his family from Upson County, Georgia to East Texas in the early 1880s. Cecil enlisted in the military on September 20, 1940 at the age of 19. Documents show he joined the cavalry branch of the regular Army. He was assigned to the First Cavalry Division stationed at Fort Bliss near El Paso, Texas.



Cecil Collier, Fort Bliss

At the time of his enlistment, the military saw the need for horse-mounted soldiers prepared to operate in the deserts of the southwestern United States. Members of the First Cavalry were troopers who spent most of their time on horseback. One of the primary duties of the First Cavalry was to perform border patrol along the rugged boundary between the United States and Mexico. With the

attack on Pearl Harbor and the onset of World War II, consideration was given as to whether a horse-mounted force was still needed. The decision was made to maintain the cavalry in the event of an enemy attack into Mexico or South America. Finally, in 1943 the Division was dismounted, gave up its horses, and began training as infantry.

According to the history of the First Cavalry, the Division arrived in Australia July 1943 and began its preparation for tropical warfare. By February 1944, First Cavalry had relocated to New Guinea for final training prior to its operations in the Admiralty Islands. February 29, 1944 was First Cavalry's date for the invasion of Los Negros, the first of the Admiralty Islands targeted. The American assault was successful in gaining a foothold but the Japanese response was fierce with hand-to-hand combat, suicidal attacks, and nighttime infiltration of the American perimeter.

As mop-up actions continued on Los Negros, March 15 saw First Cavalry troopers landing on the Japanese-held island of Manus. Fighting with the entrenched Japanese was intense in the terrain that ranged from beaches to jungle to rugged mountains in the central portion of the island. By March 28, most of Manus was in the control of the Americans. Subsequently, the lesser islands of the Admiralty chain (including Hauwei, Korunist, Rambuto, and Ndrilo) were captured by the United States so that by May 18, 1944, the battle for the Admiralty Islands was over.

The next target of the First Cavalry Division was the Philippines Islands, starting with the assault on the islands around the Gulf of Leyte on October 17, 1944. Through the next several months of almost continuous, horrendous combat, First Cavalry pushed through the Philippines arriving in the capital city of Manila on the island of Luzon on February 3, 1945. The entire island of Luzon was secured and campaign for the island ended on June 30, 1945.

With the surrender of Japan following dropping of the two atomic bombs, First Cavalry became part of the Army of Occupation of Japan. However, Cecil Collier was not among his fellow First Cavalry troopers who became "First in Tokyo". He was stateside having been wounded and temporarily left for dead in the battle for Manila on February 13, 1945.

Staff Sergeant Cecil E. Collier, First Cavalry Division, U S Army, was discharged on September 17, 1945. During his service, Collier had received the following commendations and citations.

Battle for Los Negros

One Silver Star Medal (US military's third-highest personal decoration for valor in combat)

Two Bronze Star Medals (US military decoration for heroic achievement, heroic service, meritorious achievement, or meritorious service in a combat zone)

One Purple Heart (US military decoration awarded in the name of the President to those wounded or killed while serving with the U.S. military).

Battle for Philippines

One Bronze Star Medal

One Purple Heart

In addition, he received various campaign ribbons and earned four battle stars (Los Negros, Manus,

Leyte, and Luzon).

Cecil E. Collier died on January 24, 1988. He was buried in Fairview Cemetery in Nacogdoches County, Texas.



A memorial to Sgt. Collier is found in the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. Fredericksburg is the hometown of Admiral Chester William Nimitz, fleet admiral of the United States Navy; Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet (CinCPac), for U.S. naval forces; and Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas (CinCPOA), for U.S. and Allied air, land, and sea forces during World War II.

Cecil E. Collier
Staff Sergeant, United States Army
Nacogdoches, Texas



November 14, 1920 – January 24, 1988

Enlisted September 20, 1940

First Cavalry Division

Patrolled the border between Texas and Mexico
until the start of World War II

Australia ★ New Guinea ★ Los Negros ★ Manus ★ Leyte ★ Luzon



Landed with First Wave Troops at Leyte
Wounded in Action during Battle of Luzon
in Manila, February 13, 1945
Discharged September 17, 1945



*Presented by
Tommy and Dorothy Collier*



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